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SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: REACTION TO CARTOON CONTROVERSY

1.(U) There has been little public reaction in this predominantly Muslim country to the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed in a Danish newspaper. The controversy has so far received only bare-bones, factual treatment in the local media, with coverage drawn from Western wire service reports.

12. (SBU) We did pick up a report that the issue has surfaced in the sermons at some local mosques, with Imams registering concern. Interestingly, we were told that in at least one sermon the Imam made a point of praising the USG's stance of registering concern over the portrayal of the Prophet as a terrorist while also calling on protestors to act peacefully and urging constructive dialog.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: We will continue to monitor closely the local reaction to the controversy, which, however, is not likely, in our view, to gain much traction with the public. Our sense is that most Gambians, as well as the many resident expatriate Muslims, share the GOTG leadership's staunch opposition to anything that smacks of "political Islam." END COMMENT.

STAFFORD